

Message Text

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44

ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7770

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USCINCEUR

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: MASS, BE, US

SUBJECT: MOD VANDEN BOEYNANTS' PRIVATE NEWSLETTER ENLIVENS
THE LOCAL POLITICAL SCENE

1. BELGIAN MASS CIRCULATION, INDEPENDENT DAILY LE SOIR,
PUBLISHED AN ARTICLE BY CATHERINE FERRANT IN ITS FRIDAY,
AUGUST 20, EDITIONS WHICH PUZZLED US CONSIDERABLY FOR
SEVERAL HOURS. ECHO DE LA BOURSE PUBLISHED SIMILAR PIECE
IN ITS AFTERNOON AUG 19 EDITION. LE SOIR'S ARTICLE WAS
BASED ON THE AUGUST ISSUE OF LA LETTRE, A PERSONAL NEWSLETTER
CIRCULATED TO HIS POLITICAL COHORTS BY MINISTER OF DEFENSE
VANDEN BOEYNANTS. THE LE SOIR ARTICLE QUOTED VDB IN
LA LETTRE EXTENSIVELY ALONG THE FOLLOWING LINES: "IT MUST
BE OPENLY RECOGNIZED THAT DESPITE USG ASSURANCES (ON THE
F-16) AND THE U.S. DECISION TO PURCHASE BELGIAN MACHINE GUNS,
THERE IS STRONG OPPOSITION IN THE U.S. TO SUCH TRADE....
I MUST RECOGNIZE THE FRANKLY NEGATIVE U.S. ATTITUDE

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AND THAT BELGIUM'S VITAL ECONOMIC INTERESTS ARE

SERIOUSLY COMPROMISED BY THE RIGID U.S. ATTITUDE....
BELGIAN SATISFACTION OVER THE SALE OF THE MAG 58 IS
AT LEAST PREMATURE....I MUST ALERT MY READERS TO THE
NOTORIOUS COMPENSATION ISSUE." FERRANT WENT ON TO
COMMENT ON THE UNUSUAL NATURE OF HAVING A MINISTER
OVERTLY RECOGNIZE THAT HE PARTICIPATED WITH HIS COLLEAGUES
IN AN ERROR BY CHOOSING THE F-16 AND WENT ON TO
SPECULATE THE VDB MIGHT BE TRYING TO ESTABLISH SOME
DISTANCE BETWEEN HIMSELF AND THE REST OF THE CABINET
OVER THE ERROR HE COMMITTED.

2. WE RAISED THE SUBSTANCE AND IDENTIFIED THE SOURCE
OF THE LE SOIR ARTICLE WITH VDB'S CABINET AND
EVENTUALLY TRACKED DOWN VDB'S EDITOR OF LA LETTRE,
MEETING NOTHING BUT EMBARRASSED SILENCE ALONG THE
WAY. VDB IS PRESENTLY VACATIONING ABROAD.

3. SUDDENLY IN THE LATE AFTERNOON THE PHONES OF ALL
THOSE IN THE MISSION KNOWN TO BE CONCERNED WITH THE
F-16 AND MAG 58 ISSUES BEGAN RINGING WITH CALLS FROM
VDB'S ASSISTANT CHEF DE CABINET, COL. LEFEBVRE. THE
ISSUE OF LA LETTRE CITED BY LE SOIR HAD BEEN IDENTIFIED
AS A COMPLETE FORGERY* THE DEFENSE MINISTRY INFORMED
US OF THAT IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS AND INDICATED THAT
LEGAL ACTION WOULD BE TAKEN BY THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR
TO IDENTIFY THE PERPETRATORS OF THE FALSE ISSUE OF
LA LETTRE. LE SOIR HAS INFORMED US THAT IS ALSO PLANS
TO INITIATE A LEGAL INQUIRY INTO THE FORGERY. THE
STATE RADIO AND THE PRESS WERE INFORMED OF THE FORGERY
AND LE SOIR WAS REQUESTED TO CARRY THE TEXT OF THE
DEFENSE MINISTRY'S DENIAL (THIS WAS DONE).

4. THE RESULT OF THIS SOMEWHAT BIZARRE EPISODE HAS
BEEN A FLURRY OF FAVORABLE PUBLICITY FOR THE F-16,
THE MAG 58 AND FOR U.S. POLICY. THE F-16 ENGINE
CONTRACT SIGNING BETWEEN FN AND PRATT AND WHITNEY
SCHEDULED FOR AUG. 24 IS RECEIVING WIDESPREAD (AND
ACCURATE) PUBLICITY. THE QUESTION OF WHO HOPED TO
ACCOMPLISH WHAT BY THE FORGERY REMAINS UNANSWERED
FOR THE MOMENT. WE ARE CONVINCED THAT THERE WAS A FORGERY
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(WE HAVE A COPY OF THE DOCUMENT IN QUESTION AND THE
REAL AUGUST ISSUE OF LA LETTRE) AND THAT THE DISCLAIMER
WAS NOT AN ATTEMPT BY THE DEFENSE MINISTRY TO COVER UP
A LEAK. RENNER

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